

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

IO-13 AID-05 ISO-00 CPR-01 EB-08 OC-06 CCO-00

/106 W

-----069544 211027Z /11

P R 210900Z MAR 78

FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9129

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL UDORN

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 VIENTIANE 0363

BANGKOK ALSO PASS UDORN ELECTRICALLY

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PDIP PBOR LA US

SUBJECT: LPDR CLOSES MEKONG RIVER CROSSINGS FOR FOREIGN ENTRY
AND EXIT

1. BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED. THE LAO MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS SENT A DIPLOMATIC NOTE MARCH 21 TO ALL DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN VIENTIANE TO ANNOUNCE THAT AS OF MARCH 25, THE WATTAY AIRPORT WOULD BE THE ONLY PORT OF ENTRY AND EXIT FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL. THE NOTE SAID THAT ONLY THAI AND LAO CITIZENS WOULD BE PERMITTED TO ENTER AND EXIT VIA THE SAVANNAKHET AND THADEUA RIVER BORDER CROSSING POINTS.

2. THE NOTE SAID THAT DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS AND INTER-
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NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS MUST OBTAIN PRIOR APPROVAL AND VISAS FOR THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND OTHER PROPER AUTHORITIES IN ORDER TO SEND THEIR TRUCKS TO THAILAND THROUGH THE FERRY CROSSING POINT AT THANALENG. TO DO SO FOREIGN MISSIONS MUST PROVIDE THE NAME, NATIONALITY, AND OCCUPATIONS OF THE TRUCK'S PASSENGERS AS WELLAS THE PURPOSE AND METHOD OF THE TRIP. NO MORE

THAN THREE PASSENGERS (INCLUDING THE DRIVER) WOULD BE PERMITTED TO ACCOMPANY THE TRUCK.

3. THE NOTE SAID THAT IF FOREIGN DIPLOMATS OR EXPERTS WANTED TO TAKE THEIR PERSONAL OR OFFICIAL LIGHT VEHICLE TO THAILAND THROUGH THANALENG THEN THEY MUST ALSO OBTAIN PRIOR APPROVAL BY FOLLOWING THE SAME PROCEDURES ESTABLISHED FOR TRUCKS. (COMMENT: THE NOTE DID NOT SPECIFY A LIMITATION OF THREE PERSONS FOR TRAVEL IN PRIVATE LIGHT VEHICLES. END COMMENT)

4. THE NOTE SAID THAT USE OF PASSPORTS AND OTHER TRAVEL FORMALITIES WOULD STILL BE REQUIRED FOR TRAVEL ACROSS THE BORDER TO THAILAND.

5. IN ORDER TO BRING A VEHICLE BACK INTO LAOS AT THE THANALENG FERRY CROSSING POINT THE NOTE SAID IT WOULD BE NECESSARY TO OBTAIN A VISA ISSUED BY THE LAO EMBASSY IN BANGKOK.

6. THE NOTE SAID THAT IN THE EVENT THAT AIR FLIGHTS CONNECTING VIENTIANE AND BANGKOK WERE INTERRUPTED, NECESSARY STEPS WOULD BE TAKEN TO PERMIT TRAVEL THROUGH THADEUA. END UNCLASSIFIED.

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7. COMMENT: THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT THESE NEW TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS HAVE BEEN IMPOSED SIMPLY TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF PASSENGERS USING THE EXPENSIVE (\$65.00 PER ONE-WAY TICKET), UNRELIABLE, AND UNCOMFORTABLE VIENTIANE-BANGKOK AIR SERVICE. THE PLANES OPERATE USUALLY AT FAR LESS THAN CAPACITY BECAUSE SO MANY TRAVELERS HAVE PREFERRED TO TAKE THE NONG KHAI-BANGKOK TRAIN OR THE UDORN-BANGKOK PLANE.

8. IT SEEMS TO US THAT THESE NEW RESTRICTIONS VIOLATE OR ARE AT LEAST IN CONFLICT WITH ARTICLES 26 AND 27 OF THE VIENNA CONVENTION. ARTICLE 26 REQUIRES A HOST COUNTRY TO ENSURE FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AND TRAVEL EXCEPT FOR PROHIBITIONS OR REGULATIONS FOR REASONS OF NATIONAL SECURITY. THE LAO HAVE OFFICIALLY GIVEN NO REASON FOR THEIR ACTION AND HAVE IN FACT MADE IT CLEAR THAT THE RIVER CROSSING CAN BE USED PROVIDED THE TRAVELER SUBMITS TO EXTRA RED TAPE AND EXPENSE. THEY HAVE ALSO SAID THAT SHOULD THE FLIGHTS BE STOPPED THEN THE RIVER CROSSING WOULD BE OPENED.

9. ARTICLE 27 REQUIRES A HOST COUNTRY TO PERMIT "FREE COMMUNICATION" ON THE PART OF DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS. THE NEW TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS SERIOUSLY INTERFERE WITH OUR POUCH SCHEDULE AND ALSO MAKE IT VERY DIFFICULT TO COMMUNICATE WITH OUR NEAREST NEIGHBORING POST, THE CONSULATE AT UDORN.

10. THERE IS ALSO THE PRACTICAL PROBLEM OF TRAVEL IN THE CASE OF MEDICAL EMERGENCIES. AT PRESENT, THERE ARE ONLY TWO FLIGHTS A WEEK TO BANGKOK, BUT EVEN WITH THE THREE WEEKLY FLIGHTS BEGINNING APRIL 3, WE COULD HAVE A SERIOUS MEDICAL PROBLEM. THE LAO HAVE TOLD US THAT THERE WOULD BE A DUTY OFFICER AT THE MFA TO COPE WITH EMERGENCY REQUESTS FOR LAISSEZ PASSERS TO GO TO THADEUA.
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BUT THESE NEW RULES WILL MAKE IT EVEN MORE DIFFICULT AND MORE UNLIKELY THAT TRAVEL PERMISSION WILL BE QUICKLY OBTAINABLE.

11. THE BRITISH EMBASSY IS LEADING A MOVEMENT AMONG THE VIENTIANE DIPLOMATIC CORPS TO HAVE THE DEAN (THE PHILIPPINE AMBASSADOR) CALL A MEETING OF THE CORPS TO DISCUSS THE SITUATION. WE HAVE BACKED THE BRITISH IN THIS EFFORT AND HAVE TOLD THE PHILIPPINE CHARGE (THE DEAN RETURNS FROM BANGKOK MARCH 23) THAT WE WOULD ALSO LIKE TO HAVE SUCH A MEETING.

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AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMEMBASSY PARIS
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CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 VIENTIANE 0363

BANGKOK ALSO PASS UDORN ELECTRICALLY

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12. ACTION REQUESTED: WE WOULD APPRECIATE BEING
AUTHORIZED BY THE DEPARTMENT TO TAKE THE POSITION,
EITHER IN A MEETING CALLED BY THE DEAN OR BILATERALLY
WITH THE LAO, THAT THE NEW RESTRICTIONS ARE IN CONFLICT
WITH ARTICLE 26 OF THE VIENNA CONVENTION IN THAT THEY
INTERFERE WITH FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AND TRAVEL FOR NO
NATIONAL SECURITY REASON. WE WOULD ALSO LIKE TO BE
AUTHORIZED TO TAKE THE POSITION THAT THE RESTRICTIONS
CONFLICT WITH THE FREE COMMUNICATION PROVISIONS OF
ARTICLE 27. WE WOULD LIKE TO BE ABLE TO PROTEST THE
RESTRICTIONS AND FORMALLY ASK THAT THEY BE LIFTED.
ROBERTS

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: TRAVEL CONTROLS, BORDER CONTROLS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 21 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978VIENTI00363
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780124-0066
Format: TEL
From: VIENTIANE
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780340/aaaabhvv.tel
Line Count: 192
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: dd1b61c0-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 13 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3249245
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: LPDR CLOSES MEKONG RIVER CROSSINGS FOR FOREIGN ENTRY AND EXIT
TAGS: PDIP, PBOR, LA, US, XX
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/dd1b61c0-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014